

**Thomas Jefferson to Levi Lincoln, June 1, 1803, with Copy; Partial Transcription Available, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.**

**TO LEVI LINCOLN J. MSS.**

June 1, 1803.

On reading a paragraph in the N. Y. *Evening Post*, I took up my pen to write a squib on it; but the subject run away with me till I found I had written a treatise. It is one on which I have a great desire to reconcile the parties among the republicans, & the paragraph in the *post* seemed to offer an occasion of taking just ground & introducing a public discussion of it, on which I have do doubt the opinion of all candid men would settle together with that of the executive. The interest I take in the question made me willing to hazard a few lines for the press, altho' I have thro' life scrupulously refrained from it; inasmuch that this is but the second instance of my being willing to depart from my rule. I have written it under the character of a Massachusetts citizen, with a view to it's appearing in a paper there. The *Chronicle* I suppose is most read, but how to get it there [ *faded* ] of the evidence of my handwriting. Think of this if you please; correct the paper also to make it what it should be, & we will talk of it the first time we meet. Friendly salutations, & religious silence about it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following is the article:

"Federalism returning to reason, tho' not to good manners. No matter. Decency will come in turn, when outrages on it are found to reflect only on those who commit them.

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“The symptom of returning reason to those pitiable maniacs is the following paragraph in the N. York *evening post* of May 24, where, speaking of the removal of Mr. Rogers, the naval officer, a revolutionary tory, an Englishman & not even a citizen, till the expectation of office suggested to him the expediency of becoming one, & of the appointment of Mr. Osgood, a member of the Old Congress & President of it's board of treasury, & postmaster general under the administration of Genl. Washington, Mr. Coleman says ‘The Democrats have not long since had the imprudence & *contempt of truth* to declare, that, notwithstanding the removals, the Federalists hold still a greater number of offices than they do themselves. In answer to which we have sometimes replied that, in point of value there was no comparison, and that every office of any value, *in this city* at least, if not in the U. S. except one, had been transferred to the Jeffersonian sect, and that one is now gone.’ And then he goes on with his usual scurrilities against the chief magistrate of his country, which shall not be here repeated; and with references to the President's reply to the New Haven remonstrance. I remember that in that reply it was asked whether it is political intolerance for the majority to claim a *proportionate share* in the direction of the public affairs? And, if a *due participation* of office is a matter of right, how is it to be obtained but by some removals, when nearly the whole offices of the U. S. are monopolized by a particular political sect? The reasonableness of this claim of *due proportion* of office was felt by every candid man at the first blush. But it did not accord with the feelings of Federalists. Nothing but a continuance in their monopoly of office could satisfy them: and, on the removal of the first individual, the whole band opened on the violation of their sanctuary of office, as if a general sweep had been made of every Federalist within its pale. After much uproar however repeated on every single removal, not finding in the President that want of nerve which with atheism, hypocrisy, malice &c. &c. &c., they have so liberally lent him, but that on the contrary, regardless of their barking he proceeded steadily towards his object of restoring to the excluded republicans some participation in office,

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they find it expedient to lower their tone a little. They can now bear to talk themselves of an *equal number*, instead of a monopoly of offices. This is well, as a first symptom; & we hope, in the progress of convalescence, they will become able to bear the idea of a *due proportion*. On this ground we are ready to compromise with them: and I ask what is their due proportion? I suppose the relative numbers of the two parties will be thought to fix it; and that, judging from the elections, we over-rate the Federalists at one third or fourth of the whole mass of our citizens. In a few states, say New Hampsh. Massachus. & Connecticut, they have a greater proportion; but in the others much less. By Mr. Coleman's expression that every office in this city (New York) is transferred to the Jeffersonian sect, it seems expected that the distribution of office, in every town & county taken by itself is to be in proportion to it's party division. This is impossible. It is questionable whether the scale of proportion can even be known and preserved in individual states, and whether we must not be contented with considering all the states as forming a single mass. I am not qualified to say, taking the state of New York by itself, how its parties are proportioned either in numbers or in offices. But I think it probable that, if Mr. Coleman will extend his views beyond the limits of the city, through the whole state, he will find his brethren possessing much more than their *due share* of office. I invite him to this examination, and doubt not the republicans of New York will attend to his statements, and correct them if erroneous. Confining myself to my own state, that I may speak only of what I know, I can assure Mr. Coleman that we are far below our *just proportion*. The Roll of offices published by Congress at their session before the last, informs me that in the revenue department alone of Massachusetts, there are 183. officers; of whom 33. are appointed by the President. Of these he has removed 7. either on the principle of participation, or because they were active, bitter and indecent opposers of the existing legislature & Executive. I will name them that I may be corrected if I am wrong, not meaning willfully to misstate anything. They were, Lee of Penobscot, Head of Waldoboro', Tuck & Whittermore of Gloucester, Tyng of Newburyport, Fosdyck of Portland, & Pickman of Salem. There have been two or three other removals in this state, but we have understood they were for misconduct. In Boston alone are about 30. revenue officers dependent on the collector,

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who, with the naval officer, surveyor & revenue inspectors, receive under the general government between 40 & 50,000 D. a year,

the whole weight of whose numbers, patronage and connections is actively exerted in opposition to that government, and renders the issue of the Boston election always doubtful; when, if shifted into the scale which is in support of the government, there would no longer be any question, and Boston, one of the great cities of the U. S. would arrange herself, at her proper post, under the banners of the Union. And at the head of this massive phalanx is a character, otherwise respectable and meritorious; but certainly not so when leading processions & joining in dinners, where toasts the most insulting and outrageous against the President personally & other constituted authorities, & calculated to excite seditious combinations against the authority of the union, are drank with riotous acclamations within & announced with the law of cannon without. If Mr. Coleman counts the continuance of this gentleman in office among the proofs of the intolerance of the President, I can furnish him more such. In the judiciary department we had imagined, that the judges being federal, republican attorneys & marshals would be appointed to mollify in the execution what is rigorously decreed; & that republicans might find in our courts some of that protection which flows from fellow-feeling, while their opponents enjoy that which the laws are made to pronounce. In some of the states this has been done. But here I see Mr. Bradford still holding the office of marshal, to execute federally what the judges shall federally decree: an office too of great patronage & influence in this state, & acting with all its dependencies heavily in our elections. While in the expressions of my opinion I yield sincere respect to the authorities of my country, due to their own worth, as well as to the will of the nation establishing them, yet I am free to declare my opinion, that they are wrong in retaining this person in office. I respect his private character; but his political bias unfits him for qualifying that of the court. In the post-offices of Massachusetts are about 200. officers. I know not how many may have been removed by the postmaster Genl, but judging by the sound in the federal papers, which is never below truth, I should conjecture a very small proportion indeed. It should be observed too that these offices are solely

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within the gift & removal of the Post Mast Genl the President & Senate having nothing to do with them.

“Hitherto I have spoken of the Federalists as if they were a homogeneous body, but this is not the truth. Under that name lurks the heretical sect of monarchists. Afraid to wear their own name they creep under the mantle of federalism, and the federalists, like sheep, permit the fox to take shelter among them, when pursued by the dogs. These men have no right to office.

If a monarchist be in office anywhere, and it be known to the President, the oath he has taken to support the constitution imperiously requires the instantaneous dismissal of such officer; and I should hold the President highly criminal if he permitted such to remain. To appoint a monarchist to conduct the affairs of a republic, is like appointing an atheist to the priesthood, but as to the real Federalists, I take them to my bosom as brothers: I view them as honest men, friends to the present constitution. Our difference has been about measures only, which now having passed away should no longer divide us. It was how we should treat France for the injuries offered us? They thought the occasion called for Armies & navies, that we should burthen ourselves with taxes, and our posterity with debts at exorbitant interest: that we should pass alien & sedition laws, punishing men with exile without trial by jury, & usurping the regulation of the press, exclusively belonging to the state governments. We thought some of these measures inexpedient, others unconstitutional. They, however, were the majority, they carried their opinions into effect, & we submitted. The measures themselves are now done with, except the debts contracted, which we are honestly proceeding to pay off. Why then should we longer be opposed to each other? I confess myself of opinion that this portion of our fellow-citizens should have a just participation of office, and am far from concurring with those who advocate a general sweep, without discriminating between Federalist & Monarchist. Should not these recollect their own complaints against the late administration for proscribing them from all public trust? And shall we now be so inconsistent as to act ourselves on the very principle we then so highly condemned! To countenance the anti-social doctrine that a minority has

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no rights? Never let *us* do wrong, because our opponents did so. Let us, rather, by doing right, shew them what they ought to have done, and establish a rule the dictates of reason and conscience, rather than of the angry passions. If the Federalists will amalgamate with us on these terms, let us receive them, and once more unite our country into one mass. But, as they seem to hold off with a remarkable repugnance, I agree that in the meantime both justice and safety require a due proportion of office in republican hands. Whether it is best to effect this by a single stroke, or to await the operation of deaths, resignations, & removals for delinquency, for virulent opposition, and monarchism, I am not satisfied: but am willing to leave it to the constitutional authorities, who, though they proceeded slower than I have expected, yet are probably better judges than I am of the comparative merits of the two methods. The course they seem to have preferred tends more perhaps to allay the passions which so unpleasantly divide & disquiet us; and trusted as they are, with the care of the public happiness, they are bound so to modify jarring principles as to affect that happiness as far as the state of things will admit. This seems too to be a fair ground of compromise between the extremes of opinion, even among republicans, some of whom think there should be a general removal, & others none at all. The latter opinion, I am told, is much entertained in the southern states. Still I think it will be useful to go into the examination of the question which party holds an over-proportion of office? And I therefore, again invite Mr. Coleman to take the field for the state of New York, not doubting that some champion there will enter the lists for the opposite interest. In my own state the fact is so obvious that I believe no Federalists here will undertake to question it. Should any one however appear, he will certainly find persons able and ready to confront him with facts.

“ Fair Play”